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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000169

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TAGS: PGOV PINR PREL YI UNMIK

SUBJECT: KOSOVO SERB HARD-LINERS AND MODERATES FACE OFF IN GRACANICA OVER SERBIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

REF: A. 06 PRISTINA 924

1B. 06 PRISTINA 921

1C. 06 PRISTINA 1052

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY. In what was clearly an orchestrated effort, Kosovo Serb hardliners prevented moderate Serb leaders from holding the founding session of the Serbian National Assembly (SNS) on March 4 in Gracanica. The meeting was originally the brainchild of noted Croatian Serb activist Milorad Pupovac, and was designed to bring together moderate elements of the Kosovo Serb community, a project backed quietly by the OSCE and Kosovo Prime Minister Ceku. Serb thugs, under the direction of hardline northern Serb leader (and E.O. listee) Marko Jaksic, arrived just as the meeting was scheduled to begin and forced their way into the hall with angry shouts of "Whom do you represent?" and "Marko Jaksic is our only legitimate leader!" They engaged in direct confrontation with the participants, accused them of being traitors, and prevented the congress from proceeding. After an hour of hostile verbal abuse, moderate SLKM Serb leader Oliver Ivanovic conceded that the meeting could not be held under such circumstances and adjourned for another place and time. Ivanovic told us afterwards that he believes the Serbian government was behind the incident, and asked the USG to raise the issue in Belgrade. The incident is particularly disturbing for what it portends in terms of Serb behavior; the message of intimidation sent by northern hardliners will not be missed in the south among Serb community leaders there. END SUMMARY.

MODERATE SERBS ATTEMPT TO FORM KOSOVO SERB NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

12. (SBU) On March 4, over one hundred moderate Kosovo Serbs from around Kosovo met at the Klub Privrednika in Gracanica (a large Serb enclave just outside Pristina) to hold the founding session of the Serbian National Assembly of Kosovo and Metohija (SNS). SLKM leader Oliver Ivanovic told us that this event was the "all-Serb Congress" envisioned by Croatian Serb MP Milorad Pupovac late last year, although Ivanovic indicated that Pupovac himself was no longer directly

involved (ref A). (NOTE. The Kosovo Serb director of Leposavic-based TV Mir, Nenad Radosavljevic, has long advocated for a similar body. Neither Pupovac or Radosavljevic attended the event. END NOTE).

¶3. (SBU) As President of the SNS Organizing Board, Petar Miletic sent out invitations to the international community liaison offices the prior week (NOTE. Miletic is also spokesperson for moderate Slobodan Petrovic's Autonomous Liberal Party (SLS). END NOTE) According to the invitation, the SNS would be a "new political organization with no affiliation to political parties," reflecting the "need for Kosovo Serbs to organize and unite," with the ultimate objective of creating new relationships with international institutions and the Kosovar Albanian community.

¶4. (C) Ivanovic told us that he was closely involved in the organization of the event, and said that participants included "selected" representatives of Kosovo Serbs from around Kosovo. Among them were SLS President Petrovic, SLKM members Vesna Jovanovic, Gojko Savic, Dragisa Krstic, Novo Brdo Mayor Petar Vasic and Velika Hoca representative of Belgrade's Coordination Center for Kosovo and Metohija (CCK) Dejan Baljosevic. Milorad Pavlovic, one of the Kosovo Serb returnees injured in the September 2006 grenade attack in Klina, also attended as a participant (ref B). Notably absent were SLKM members Randjel Nojkic, who had previously voiced his strong opposition to the SNS (ref C), and Belgrade negotiating team member Goran Bogdanovic.

#### THUGS BREAK UP THE ASSEMBLY BEFORE IT STARTS

¶5. (SBU) Several minutes before the meeting was scheduled to start, a group of approximately twenty men entered the hall

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with shouts of "whom do you represent?" They were led by Gracanica CCK representative Srdjan Vasic and Serbian MP Zvonko Stevic, both members of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS). Among the group were Pristina CCK representative and New Serbia (NS) member Slavisa Nikolic, Kosovo Polje CCK representative Petar Savic, Slobodan Vasic and Djorge Stankovic from Priluzje, Nikola Tripkovic and village leaders from the Serb-majority enclave of Plementina. The intruders continued shouting loudly at the participants, insisting that they represented no one, and that northern Mitrovica hardliner and E.O.-listee Marko Jaksic is the only "legitimate" representative of Kosovo Serbs. They accused the organizers of trying to usurp Jaksic's northern Mitrovica-based Association of Serb Municipalities and Settlements (ASMS). They also shouted support for Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica and his Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS), as well as for DSS coalition partner NS. According to one SNS participant, the thugs read a letter from Marko Jaksic condemning the SNS, though it was difficult to hear in the din. (NOTE. Jaksic's hardline Serbian National Council (SNC) poured further calumny on the SNS in a March 1 press conference, proclaiming that the SNS aims to cut institutional ties between Kosovo Serbs and Serbia and to persuade Kosovo Serbs to live in an independent Kosovo. END NOTE).

¶6. (SBU) SNS participants calmly asked the intruders to leave, pointing out that this was a private meeting, but the thugs eventually forced their way down the length of the hall to the front of the room, where they proceeded to engage the SNS participants and organizers in heated (and extremely repetitive) verbal confrontations. According to those at the front of the room, the thugs accused the participants of being traitors and "American spies," and threatened them with "lynching" if the meeting went forward. They asserted menacingly that such an event could never be held in Gracanica, the "heart of all that is Serbia in Kosovo." Much of their vehemence was directed squarely at Ivanovic, who they claimed was an agent of Kosovo PM Agim Ceku. They accused him of failing to return Serbs to Kosovo and of

trying to manipulate fellow Serbs.

¶ 17. (SBU) Ivanovic stood his ground and calmly refuted their arguments, maintaining that Kostunica, Tadic and CCK chief Sanda Raskovic-Ivic were among the invitees but none of them chose to come. Later he told the media that that the Belgrade negotiating team was not taking into account the interests of the enclaves south of the Ibar, and that as a consequence Serbs there needed to organize and defend their own interests. Others were equally vehement in defense of the SNS congress; Marija Gavric, a former protocol assistant to Bishop Artemije but moderate in her own personal views, confronted the thugs directly, asking them whom they represent and forcing them to concede that they also were not elected by anyone. After an hour of heated back and forth in front of the assembled media and representatives of the international liaison offices, Ivanovic conceded that the meeting could not be held under such circumstances and said it would be rescheduled for another place and time. This announcement was met with applause by the intruders.

#### KOSOVO SERB MEDIA HIGHLY PROACTIVE

¶ 18. (SBU) Among the numerous media representatives present at the altercation, Radio KiM reporters from the small Serb enclave of Caglavica took a particularly active role in questioning the intruders about their motives. One Radio KiM reporter asked the thugs what they thought the SNS was hoping to achieve in the meeting. When the thugs responded that they had no idea, the reporter asked them why they did not sit and listen and find out what it was all about, instead of coming in and immediately disrupting the session. The same reporter later asked Serbian MP Stevic, who was among the intruders, if he would be submitting expense reports to the Serbian Assembly for his travel to Kosovo that day. Stevic and the thugs demurred on all counts. In contrast to local

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Serb media coverage, Serbian RTS coverage broadcast throughout Kosovo echoed northern Serb claims that the meeting was disrupted by "citizens" protesting against the "efforts of the SNS to destroy Kosovo Serb unity."

#### IVANOVIC and SAVA PLEADS FOR ASSISTANCE

¶ 19. (C) After the event, Ivanovic told COM that he believed the Serbian government was behind the attempt to stop the SNS. He asked us to contact Serbian President Boris Tadic directly, saying that Kostunica was firmly against the SNS and could not be persuaded to change his mind. COM assured him that USOP will do everything possible to support Serb efforts to move forward with the SNS. Moderate Serbian Orthodox Church leader Father Sava also bemoaned the disruption of the congress and asked USOP to assist the SNS, saying that their positions are "reasonable and constructive."

¶ 110. (C) COMMENT. The Gracanica incident is an unfortunate portent of hardline Serb behavior, particularly troubling because it was manifested in the south as an undoubtedly signal to Serb moderates there that no one should harbor any illusion as to who's in charge. The clear message of intimidation will not be lost on Serbs anywhere in Kosovo. USOP appreciates Embassy Belgrade's intent to raise this with the leadership in Belgrade; the kind of heavy-handed pressure evinced on Sunday in Gracanica cannot be allowed to pass unremarked, and we will use the occasion of A/S Fried's visit to Kosovo to follow up with Serb leaders in both north and the south and reiterate our key redlines on violence and intimidation. END COMMENT.

¶ 111. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.  
KAIDANOW